

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Michael G. Dzigan, City Manager
DATE: January 26, 2026
SUBJECT: 250th Birthday Mural Wall Proposal

During its review of the Board and Commission Annual Reports, the City Council challenged the boards and commissions to develop programming to commemorate America's 250th birthday in Wheaton. In response, the Fine & Cultural Arts Commission is proposing a mural on the retaining wall north of the pavilion, shown in the red box below.

Commission members will present the proposal at the Planning Session. Given the short timeframe and the need to review the artists' concepts, it would be important for the City Council to provide feedback on whether you wish to move forward with the proposal. The Commission estimates the project budget to be between \$40,000 and \$60,000.

Mural Along Prairie Path Retaining Wall at Pavilion



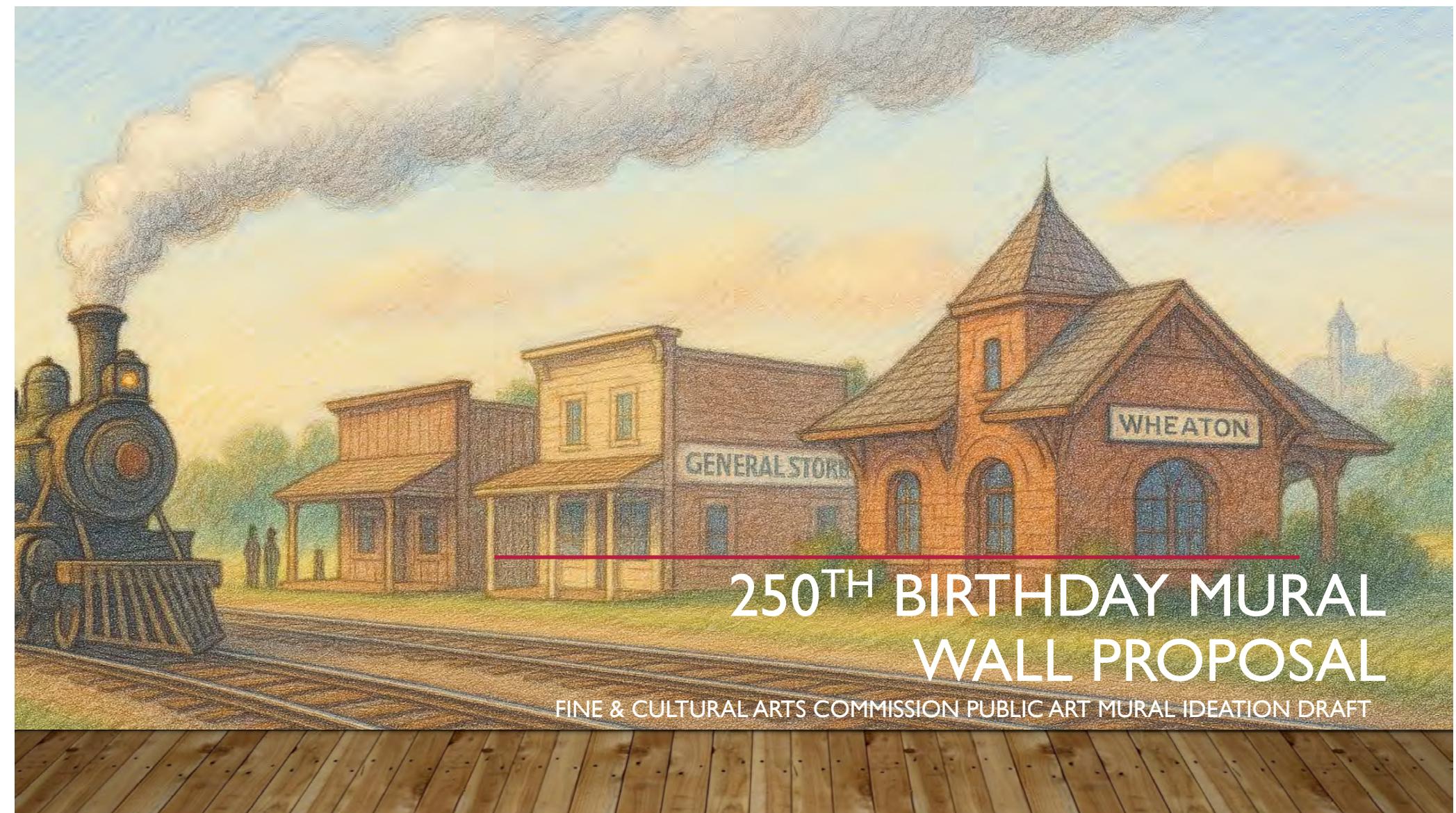
Attachment



WHEATON MAYOR PHILIP J. SUESS

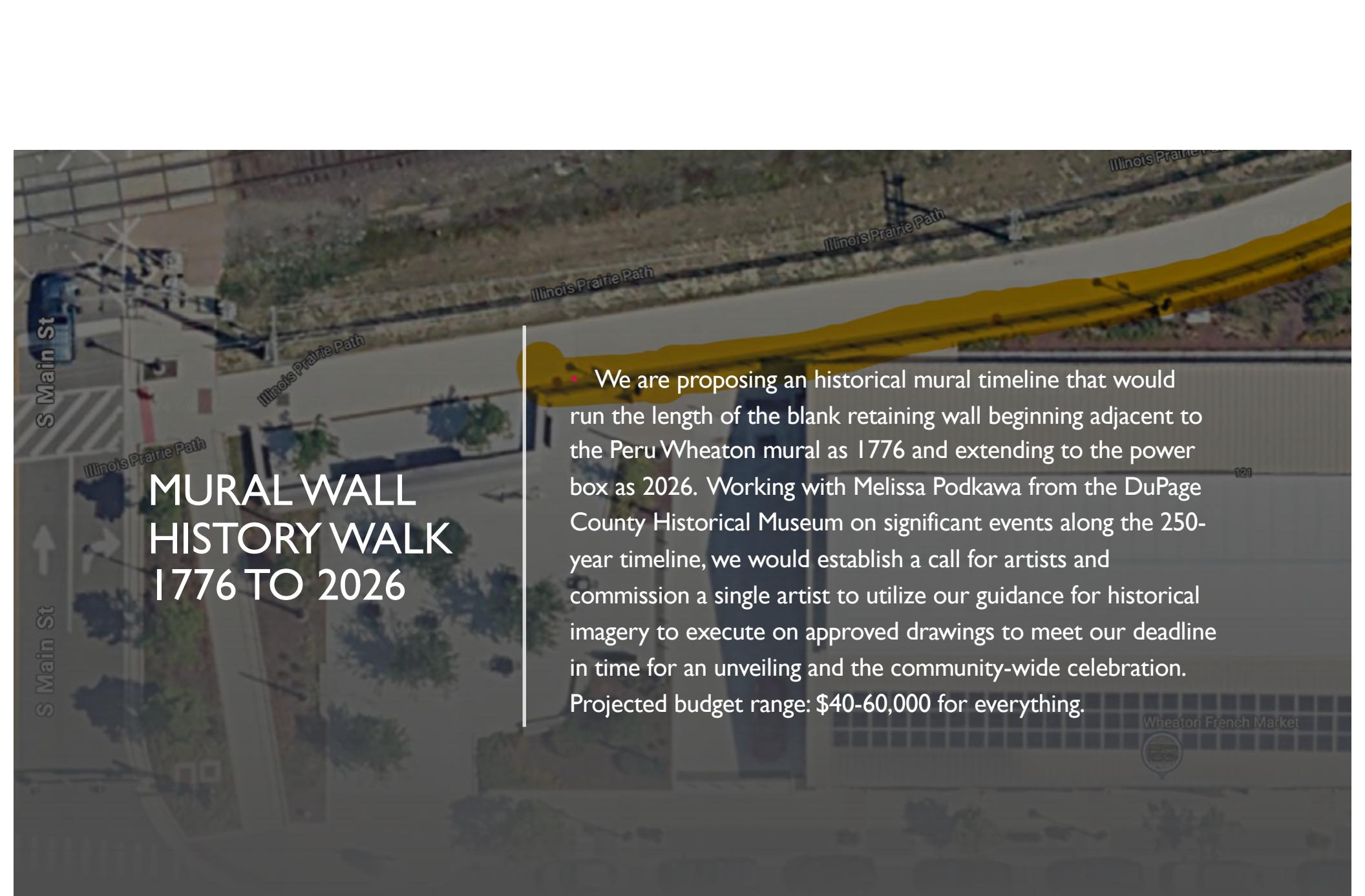
CITY MANAGER MICHAEL DZUGAN

CITY COUNCIL: ERICA BRAY-PARKER | LEAH BRICE | SCOTT BROWN | BRADLEY CLOUSING | LYNN ROBBINS | SCOTT WELLER



250TH BIRTHDAY MURAL WALL PROPOSAL

FINE & CULTURAL ARTS COMMISSION PUBLIC ART MURAL IDEATION DRAFT



MURAL WALL HISTORY WALK 1776 TO 2026

- We are proposing an historical mural timeline that would run the length of the blank retaining wall beginning adjacent to the Peru Wheaton mural as 1776 and extending to the power box as 2026. Working with Melissa Podkawa from the DuPage County Historical Museum on significant events along the 250-year timeline, we would establish a call for artists and commission a single artist to utilize our guidance for historical imagery to execute on approved drawings to meet our deadline in time for an unveiling and the community-wide celebration.

Projected budget range: \$40-60,000 for everything.



180-FOOT SECTION FROM EXISTING MURAL TO POWER BOX



TIMELINE AS A STORYBOARD ACROSS THE SPACE

1776 1826 1876 1926 1976 2026



IN THE STYLE OF THOMAS HART BENTON OR SIMILAR AMERICAN REALISM ARTISTS

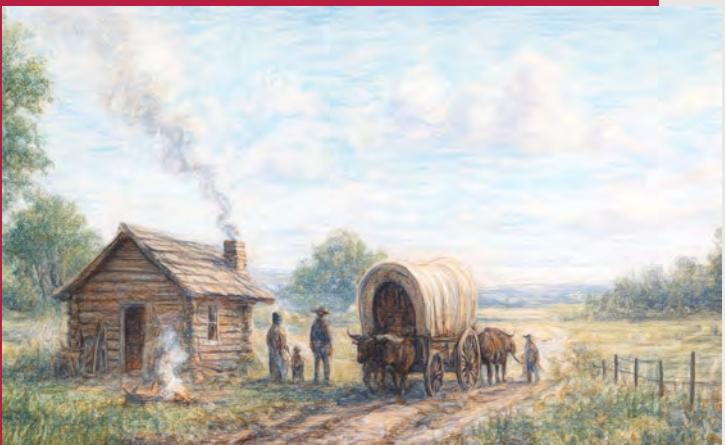


PANEL I — 1776: “Prairie Origins & Potawatomi Homeland”

Working title: “Where the Land Breathes”

Historical

- There is no Wheaton yet—nor any European settlement.
- The area is part of the homeland of the Potawatomi, with cultural influence from neighboring Illinois Confederation, Ojibwe, and Odawa peoples.
- A rich ecosystem of tallgrass prairie, oak savanna, wetlands, bison trails, and migratory bird routes.
- Bison, elk, wolves, cranes, oak groves—representing what the land looked like before settlement.
- A symbolic “Land Acknowledgment” panel grounded in local geography, not generic imagery.



PANEL 2 — 1826: “Frontier Crossings”

Working title: “First Footprints of Settlement”

Historical

- Still no town, but the first European-American settlers begin moving into the DuPage region.
- Early cabins and claims form near what will become Wheaton, including the Blanchard family (arriving in the early 1830s).
- Roads are wagon tracks; the land is still overwhelmingly wild.
- Small log cabins with smoke rising against the prairie.
- Ox-drawn wagons crossing muddy tracks.
- A symbolic panel showing meeting of cultures between settlers and Native residents.



PANEL 3 — 1876: “The Railway Town Emerges”

Working title: “Tracks of Transformation”

Historical

- Wheaton is incorporated (1859) and booming by 1876.
- The Chicago & Northwestern Railway defines the town center.
- Downtown begins to take its recognizable shape.
- Wheaton College (founded 1860) is rising as an institution.
- Local farms ship milk, grain, and goods by rail. Horse-drawn wagons lined along Front Street.
- Victorian storefronts, hitching posts, and dirt roads.



PANEL 4 — 1926: “Suburban Hopes in the Jazz Age”

Working title: “Main Street Modern”

Historical

- Wheaton is firmly a rail suburb of Chicago, prosperous and growing.
- Brick streets and modern storefronts appear downtown.
- Cars replace horses; Prohibition is in full swing.
- The DuPage County Courthouse (1896) is a civic landmark.
- Neighborhoods like the Chicago Golf area and College Avenue districts expand. Model T Fords parked in front of classic Wheaton storefronts.
- Flapper-era fashion walking along Main Street.
- The courthouse, historic churches, and early suburban homes.



PANEL 5 — 1976: “Bicentennial Wheaton

Working title: “Stars, Stripes & Suburbia”

Historical

- Explosive post-war suburban growth has fully reshaped Wheaton.
- Malls, parks, schools, and subdivisions define the landscape.
- 1976 celebrations include flags, parades, and Bicentennial badges.
- Cosley Zoo opens (1974).
- Families flock to the Wheaton Park District programs that remain community staples today.
- Bicentennial parade scenes on Main or Front Street.
- Red-white-blue bunting on downtown buildings.



PANEL 6 — 2026:“A Community Looking Forward”

Working title:“The Next 250”

Historical

- Wheaton is now a vibrant, diverse, highly educated suburb with a focus on:
- Downtown revitalization
- Trail systems & prairie restoration
- Inclusive community programming
- Arts festivals, community concerts, children’s art, multicultural festivals.
- A sense of welcome, belonging, creativity, civic pride.
- Possibly a “future Wheaton” vignette representing the next 250 years.